

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, September 17, 2021

**Josef Newgarden**

**Colton Herta**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We want to welcome everybody to Laguna Seca, another NTT INDYCAR SERIES weekend. Joined by Josef Newgarden and Colton Herta, the top two in practice on Friday.

To open things up, how great is it to be back at this facility, which is so fabulous?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's amazing. This track is a lot of fun, has all sorts of challenges. Especially once you kind of get that second or third run on tires, the (indiscernible) go off, it makes it even that much more challenging.

Yeah, a track with a good flow of high speed, low speed corners kind of everything that you want.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: This place is great. That's it (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Nice way to start the weekend for both you guys. Some thoughts on practice today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, we were here testing about a month and a half, two months ago with these guys. Our car felt pretty similar. We were pretty happy at the test.

Actually we didn't run a lot of miles oddly enough because we were trying to save some of those miles on an engine. We ended up changing it anyway, so I kind of wish we had some more running.

Overall we unloaded pretty good. I felt like that matched this morning. Small differences here or there, but for the most part globally it felt like the car was in the window. Just got to look after it.

Obviously things can change quickly. In Portland we were pretty sorted out in practice one, we choked in qualifying and were pretty far off the pace. That's the number one thing for us in the 2 car, have a consistent run all the way through. If we can do that, we'll be in the fight.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts.

COLTON HERTA: I think it's tough to do a 45-minute session on one set of tires. Waiting for most of it, waiting to see what kind of lap times guys were doing.

Compared to when we were at the test, I think the track was a lot better. It was quite nice. Even though it seemed like it was similar temperature, seemed to be a little bit more grip today.

Car felt a little different to the test for me. So I think we have some adjustments to make to kind of get it back in the window. But we're right there. Great start to be P2 and less than a 10th off.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Let's start by clarifying. You both only used one set for the whole session?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yep.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, aeroscreen.

**Q. Grip-wise, does that seem like it's changed or is the dirt getting out there, you can hardly get a read?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, to Colton's point, it's just really hard. It's a 45-minute session, which is already condensed. If you're only going to run one set of tires, which we did, you get really one run to get a read. I mean, even the second run, because the dropoff is quite high, it can muddy any read you're trying to perform.

It's just incredibly difficult to understand what the car's doing or if you want to improve it, what happened run to run, then the dust gets kicked up on the track a lot when you have 28 cars.

We didn't have it so much at the test because there were not many cars continually going off. You had a lot of cars here that were just constantly kicking up dirt onto curbing. It makes it difficult to read the car here and understand



where things are at.

But I think that's part of the challenge at these types of tracks, you have to be really good at doing it. Whenever you get a really good run, you have to assess the car with that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's tricky. I mean, to me it's like Sonoma. Sonoma was just a nightmare to figure out what was better or worse with any change. If you're trying to work on the race car, work on tire degradation, it's very difficult to understand and assess what makes the car better or worse in those conditions. I think it's the same thing here. That's sort of the challenge of this place.

Hopefully showing up with a car that's inherently better than the people around you, your philosophy, the way that you run the dampers, the way you set up the mechanical balance, you hope that feeds into better tire life. Trying to improve it on a weekend like this is pretty difficult, I would say.

**Q. The yellow flags can dictate how the race goes like last week at Portland. Is this a track that really favors the pole winner?**

COLTON HERTA: Yes and no. I think it depends on how good your tire deg is, how well you can take care of your tires. In 2019 it was a little bit easier, too, because of how the windows were played out. Now we have a 95-lap race, so... The window does seem a little bit bigger.

Was it a two-stop in 2019?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Three. I don't know. I haven't looked.

COLTON HERTA: I feel like the windows are bigger than 2019 for some reason.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's a three.

COLTON HERTA: I don't know why the windows got bigger. Interesting. Maybe I don't know what I'm talking about (smiling).

**Q. Your thoughts?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: On yellows?

**Q. Whether the polesitter has an advantage at this particular track because it's a big track and there's not a lot of low-speed turns.**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, just looking at the three-versus the four-stop, that can be pretty interesting. Then you have to contend with traffic here and the yellows, like you mentioned.

Yeah, I do think it's important to start up front here. I think it's a little bit harder to pass here than at other places.

The one saving grace is if you don't qualify well here, but you happen to have a car that's really good on tire life, I think that can play to your advantage, to go up on the field.

Tire degradation is going to be such a big deal in the race here. If you inherently have a car that's gentle on tires, you can use that to your advantage to take advantage of people as they start to drop off.

It's a hard question to answer because we don't know. It's a new year in '21 versus '19. The aeroscreen is going to be different in a way that we don't know yet. I don't know what that is going to do to the tires fully. Even though we tested here, we didn't do a lot of race running.

I think it's always good to start up front, but in INDYCAR racing that can also play against you pretty easily depending how the yellows fall.

THE MODERATOR: I'm reminded you both had pretty good times the last time you race here. You won the race and the championship here. Just to have the race back in the schedule, I'm sure you missed it last year.

COLTON HERTA: Oh, yeah, three races on the West Coast, amazing tracks. It's fun to drive and race. It's nice to have them back. I love these next two races coming up. My favorite ones on the calendar, Laguna Seca and Long Beach.

**Q. Colton, some drivers have gone back and forth. You're a West Coast guy. Have you stayed out here for the full three weeks?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, uh-huh.

**Q. What will this week and next week be like for you since they're both kind of home races?**

COLTON HERTA: I think with COVID and stuff, it's still not too much media, advances and stuff.

**Q. Friends, families, parties?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I'll go back home to Santa Clarita and hang out with my family. That will be nice.



**Q. Will you have more people at the race or anything?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think so. I don't pay for people's tickets. If they want to come, I only get a certain amount. Beyond that they can buy theirs. I think a few of my friends are coming.

**Q. Jimmie Johnson has 40 this week.**

COLTON HERTA: 40?

**Q. Yes. It's his birthday.**

COLTON HERTA: There you go.

THE MODERATOR: I don't think he gets 40 tickets. I think he has to buy some.

COLTON HERTA: He might.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think they give them to him. I mean, Jimmie Johnson. He deserves it, to be honest.

**Q. The conditions seemed pretty tricky out there for the practice session.**

COLTON HERTA: I don't think the track was terrible. I think the tire dropoff was the main problem. First session, so the track is a little green.

IMSA here last weekend put a lot of rubber down. Indy Lights before. Whatever else was on track before us. Quite a bit has run in the last two weekends.

I don't think the track was terrible. I just think the dropoff is tricky here. The more rubber goes down, the better the tire wear will be and stuff like that.

**Q. Josef, more than just having experience here, you certainly have experience racing for a championship. Does that give you a leg up over Pato and Alex this weekend?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think so. I think Alex has obviously proved he can perform at a track he's not been at before, as evidenced last week in Portland. Pato obviously is a very skilled driver, as well. I think highly of both of them.

I don't really know whether there's an advantage. I've been here once myself in '19, which you could say is (indiscernible). I just don't think it is with this crop of guys. I think they're pretty impressive. I don't think I have a leg up at all.

**Q. Josef, can and will your teammates be of help to you this weekend?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: If they can be. It just depends on the positioning we're in. If there's a situation where they can help me out, I'm sure they would lend the helping hand, just as I would in the flip of the situation.

We've always been good at that at Penske, understanding the overall goal. We may not be in that situation. Hard to predict what's going to be happening in the race. I think if there's a chance to help, we'll be helping each other.

**Q. Alex was happy he won pole last week because he had a good pit stall after that. Why is pit stall position important here? Could it be important deciding one or two positions in the race on Sunday?**

COLTON HERTA: It could. It is like jam-packed. We are like sardines in a can in pit lane this weekend. I feel like there's 24 pit spots, but we're all crammed in there. It will be interesting.

I think if there's a yellow flag pit stop, that will be very interesting. I think some guys might have to get pushed back and stuff.

Yeah, pit stall can make a difference. I think the biggest difference for them last weekend was when they came in after they got sent to the back. I did, too. Everybody took tires except for the Ganassi cars, which was smart on their part. That's kind of what made the difference for them in the race, to get that track position, get going on that.

Oh, yeah, it can make a difference, especially here. It's tight, isn't it? It's going to be interesting for the race.

THE MODERATOR: Agree, Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know what's -- I forget what the minimum box size is. I feel like we're on it. You can't go much smaller. I mean, it's really difficult to get into your pit box.

Yeah, hopefully it doesn't cause any problems, but the potential's there for sure. If there's a yellow flag stop, we're all taking it, it's going to be tough.

**Q. Besides the small boxes, are you pitted flat or either one of you going uphill?**

COLTON HERTA: It's easy now, right? Before you would have to put your feet like this to kind of hold the brake when you were leaving. Now you only have two pedals.

Easy to kind of...

**Q. Seemed like Alex, he did a much bigger burnout. You don't think that's a problem?**

COLTON HERTA: It's okay.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think it's a big disadvantage.

THE MODERATOR: 10 of the top 11 have an H next to them. Is that an advantage for you guys?

COLTON HERTA: What?

THE MODERATOR: H, Honda.

COLTON HERTA: How about that?

Yeah, I think when it comes to races like this that rely on traction and stuff, I do think the Honda is a little bit better than the Chevy at this point putting power down.

Maybe that's some of it. But maybe those guys just had a good session, too. For sure Honda for me has done an incredible job this year. Speedways they were really good, top speed. Now on the road courses and street courses, they're really good there as well, so never a doubt for me with that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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